**Nebraska Information Technology Commission
Strategic Initiatives**

Strategic Plan for the
Nebraska eLearning Initiative

Objective

The primary objective of this initiative is to promote the effective and efficient integration of technology into the instructional process and to utilize technology to deliver enhanced educational opportunities to students at all levels throughout Nebraska on an equitable and affordable basis.

This initiative also involves the establishment of a Nebraska eLearning Consortium to organize and facilitate the development and execution of a Pre-Kindergarten-Adult Education statewide eLearning strategy to:

- Connect eLearning innovators and leverage their expertise and experience;
- Build collaborative relationships between K-12 and Higher Ed educators;
- Develop discipline-specific and age-specific instructional design models;
- Encourage the development and sharing of instructional content; and
- Ensure the infrastructure required to support the deployment and ongoing support of eLearning is in place and available.

The eLearning Consortium would also be responsible for providing administrative and technical support to include:

- The negotiation of required hardware and software purchasing and licensing agreements;
- Development and implementation of deployment strategies; and
- Providing hosting, training, and technical support services as necessary.

The primary components of eLearning encompasses:

- Course Management Software. This technology supports the development and delivery of instructional content, assessment and grading, lesson planning, and provides learners with instructional support features to include interactive chat and threaded discussion groups, linkage to reference materials, etc.

- Content Management Software. This technology would serve as the basis for the establishment of a Nebraska eLearning Knowledge Repository to facilitate the sharing of educational content. This Knowledge Repository would provide the ability

to store, organize, classify, categorize, control access to, share, retrieve, and present digital content of all forms to include audio, video, graphical, and textual.

- Infrastructure. This includes the network, organizational, administrative, and support resources required to deploy and support eLearning statewide.

Benefits

Establishing a statewide eLearning strategy will provide students and teachers all over Nebraska access to rich instructional resources that are not currently available.

The benefits of a statewide eLearning system would include:

- The sharing of learning objects and other educational content and reference materials that would significantly enrich and deepen the learning experiences offered to Nebraska students, particularly those in the K-12 sector;
- Greater collaboration among educators at all levels;
- The building of extended educational communities of learning and support for ongoing professional development and lifelong learning opportunities;
- Creation of a dual-use training engine for other state agencies, political subdivisions, and adult continuing education;
- Development of diverse instructional and training modules ranging from the simple (how to operate a piece of machinery) to the complex (a web-based course to achieve technician certification).

Current Status

Higher education institutions have made significant investments and deployments of this technology. Survey data collected in 2002 by the staff of the Nebraska Information Technology Commission revealed that eight of 15 Nebraska independent colleges and universities were using some type of course management software. From the same data, all six community colleges, all three state colleges, and all four campuses of the University of Nebraska system were also using some commercial version of the software, ranging from Blackboard to WebCT to Jones eKnowledge. Course usage by students and faculty involvement has reportedly grown by over 10% per year.

In the 2002 data, K-12 schools were just beginning to explore the software using open source or single-district contracts. As of August 2004, a consortium of ESUs (the Nebraska Web-based Staff Development Affiliated Consortium -- NWSDAC) had contracted with CyberLearning Lab's Angel software to replace their 2003-04 contract with Blackboard. NWSDAC reports 15 of 18 Educational Service Units involved with the NWSDAC purchase agreement.

This report should also mention the early development of Class.com, which has continued to offer eLearning services to the present. Class.com has formed strategic partnerships with the Plano ISD eSchool (Texas), Virtual Greenbush AEA (Kansas), and Westside Virtual High School (Nebraska).

Nationally, 14 states have reported the creation of statewide virtual high schools with 25 more states with some type of statewide eLearning involvement.

Future

The ultimate future state of Nebraska's eLearning initiative is largely unknown. Higher education institutions still have potential for additional software penetration with additional seat licenses and also additional options for portals and enterprise versions.

If higher education growth is any indication, Nebraska K-12 schools are on the edge of a tremendous growth period with eLearning. There is unmet needs in rural areas of the State to achieve educational equity of opportunity and eLearning is one tool to assist. Nebraska's 300+ interactive video, distance learning classrooms could immediately adopt course management software for course organization, electronic assessments, and teacher-student and student-student communications.

Nebraska citizens and students would enjoy a much greater access to more flexible lifelong learning opportunities, should a statewide eLearning strategy be adopted. Additional educational opportunity often results in workforce development and enhanced economic vitality. Nebraska's economic engine will be improved through greater retention of high school and college graduates.

Recommended Actions

(NOTE: These recommendations are still subject to change, pending additional advice from those entities that are participating in this strategic initiative.)

A statewide eLearning Consortium to advance the Nebraska eLearning Initiative and improve coordination between K-12, higher education, and adult/continuing education will be established using the following action steps:

A. Organize a series of September 2004 Planning Workshops to bring together participants who have a stake in improving educational and training opportunities for Nebraska citizens through eLearning.

Actions include:

1. Planning Workshop Products:
   - An assessment of current 2004 Course management tool software usage among higher education and K-12 schools;
   - Synthesis of planning workshop contributions to reach a common vision statement for eLearning in Nebraska;
   - Perform a gap analysis between current usage and the future vision of eLearning in Nebraska.
   a. Lead Entity: Staff of the Nebraska Information Technology Commission, working in concert with the NITC Education Council, and staff of the University of Nebraska Computer Services Network.

b. Timeframe: September 20-28, 2004
c. Funding: Travel expenses of $750.

B. Develop a design document detailing the technology components, standards, costs and administration of a Nebraska eLearning Knowledge Repository for the sharing of educational content.

Actions include:

1. Development of an eLearning Knowledge Repository design document.
    a. Lead Entity: Staff of the Nebraska Information Technology Commission, working in concert with the NITC Education Council, and staff of the University of Nebraska Computer Services Network.
    b. Timeframe: June 30, 2005
    c. Funding: No funding required for this task.

C. Work with education and staff development professionals to document strategies, techniques and tools used in course management and create a clearinghouse of eLearning best practices and training modules.

Actions include:

1. Creation of a clearinghouse of eLearning best practices and training modules.
    a. Lead Entity: Staff of the Nebraska Information Technology Commission, working in concert with the NITC Education Council, and staff of the University of Nebraska Computer Services Network.
    b. Timeframe: December 31, 2005
    c. Funding: No funding required for this task.